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SUBJECT: EPRT ANBAR 1: FALLUJAH SHEIKS FEAR SECURITY RISKS

Classified By: ePRT Team Leader Steve Banks for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (U)This is an ePRT Anbar 1 (Fallujah) cable.

12. (C) SUMMARY: On September 24, Fallujah's city council sheikhs complained that reduced U.S. aid and GoI budget austerity are spurring unemployment and creating fertile ground for Al Qaida recruitment. They lobbied for increased U.S. aid projects to help address these problems. The sheikhs are concerned about the lack of tangible results on job creation and improved public services. They also alleged that local Iraqi Police have been hamstrung by personnel changes and more restrictive human rights procedures imposed by Baghdad. The sheikhs conceded that electricity and water supply have both improved noticeably, yet noted that average Fallujans fail to perceive that the Advise and Assist Brigade's new mission is for their benefit. END SUMMARY

GETTING TO KNOW THE CITY COUNCIL

13. (C) Fallujah City Council Vice Chairman Sheikh Talib Hasnawi Efan al-Issawi hosted a welcome lunch for new ePRT Team Leader (TL), several ePRT members, and two Army officers from the local battalion (1-504, 1-82nd). Several other sheikhs and some council members also attended. Other city council members attending were Council Chairman Sheikh Hamid Ahmid Hashim al-Alwani, Sheikh Salam Ajmi Al-Halbosi, Sheikh Hamed Al-Zoba'ai, and Khalid Abdullah. Sheikhs Talib and Hamid were the main interlocutors.

LESS U.S. AID MEANS MORE UNEMPLOYMENT AND QAIDA RECRUITING

14. (C) The sheikhs frequently repeated their request for a new infusion of U.S. assistance projects in Fallujah district, to sustain progress on infrastructure improvements and to increase employment. The council members expressed concern about reduced funding levels accompanying the Marines' departure and handoff to the Army which they believe will increase unemployment and create fertile ground for Al Qaida recruiters. TL noted that the apparently large drop in funding is due primarily to reduced overall assistance from U.S. forces and the transition to full Iraqi sovereignty.

15. (C) The sheikhs called for increased assistance for agriculture (Fallujah's primary economic driver) -- and rehabilitating basic infrastructure. They highlighted problems caused by reduced Euphrates water levels, including a supply shortage for drinking and irrigation, increased soil salinity, and water intake pipes that no longer reach the river. The sheikhs lobbied to sustain current U.S. aid levels through at least February or March 2010, which would carry them through elections. Council members were not sanguine about Fallujan voter participation, saying that average Fallujans are more focused on everyday survival than elections.

POWER AND WATER - IMPROVING BUT MORE TO DO

¶16. (C) The sheikhs acknowledged notable improvements in the delivery of electricity and water to district residents. Sheikh Talib noted that ice-making factories throughout the district are shutting down for lack of business, because local consumers are now getting enough electricity to keep their refrigerators cold. Talib said he owns an ice factory but plans to sell it.

¶17. (C) Sheikh Salam asked ePRT assistance in installation of new electric transformer and lines to electrify neighborhoods in his constituency. Salam said that his constituents were prepared to pay for a new transformer if Ministry of Electricity (MoE) would commit to install, connect, and service the new equipment. EPRT electricity advisors noted that the MoE has U.S.-supplied electrical transformers in a Fallujah warehouse awaiting installation in the district, and suggested that the council might approach the Fallujah Director General (DG) of Electricity directly about this.

¶18. (C) NOTE: Despite USACE's transfer of electrical transformers and supplies to the MoE in late 2008, there has been minimal progress on expanding Fallujah's power grid. The GOI's tight 2009 budget has provided scant resources for installing the transformers and earlier this year the Provincial Electricity DG requisitioned some 40 of the transformers from the Fallujah. Unfortunately, the USACE agreement on transfer of the electrical equipment did not specifically proscribe this type of requisition. END NOTE

DETERIORATING SECURITY; POLICE LESS EFFECTIVE

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¶19. (C) The sheikhs worried about the security consequences of releasing detainees, coupled with a police force constrained by Baghdad's enhanced enforcement of human rights regulations. They noted that Fallujan security forces (many of whom had lost family members to attacks) effectively fought Al Qaida in Iraq (AQI) in the past, and had "special ways" to elicit information. Yet Baghdad's increasingly stringent rules have meant that many police officers have been fired and put on trial for abuses. The sheikhs expressed less confidence in the current local Iraqi Police chief, Col. Mahmood, than in his predecessor. Sheikh Talib said the local IP still has a number of good policemen, who remain committed to fighting AQI, but many others are less capable and were appointed by the disliked Interior Minister.

COURTS ADEQUATE EXCEPT FOR TERRORISM-RELATED CASES

¶10. (C) Sheikh Hamid felt that the courts generally work fine except in terrorism cases, in which judges and court workers are too fearful to dispense justice. They routinely release defendants with ties to terrorism, he said.

DON'T WANT TO SEE MILITARY TRUCKS ANYMORE

¶11. (C) The sheikhs relayed average Fallujans' dislike for seeing U.S. military trucks and soldiers, which they believed would vanish with the Security Agreement (SA). They added that Fallujans remain skeptical that the U.S. convoys support beneficial assistance projects. To help minimize public discontent, the sheikhs advised U.S. military personnel to reduce their profile by inviting local partners to meet them on base rather than the military traveling downtown. They were receptive to TL proposal to repaint Army trucks or use a special logo to highlight their assistance function, so that the U.S military presence seems less menacing.

SEEKING GREATER CONTROL OVER U.S. PROJECTS

¶12. (C) Sheikh Talib proposed that the city council, mayor, or planning office vet ePRT projects so that city officials can be familiar with all projects and oversee implementation. He noted the need to ensure that project benefits are distributed equitably and for the greatest good. He argued that the city council members have much better knowledge about appropriate recipients of assistance than American personnel. TL responded that it would not be constructive to channel projects benefiting private sector or NGO recipients through the city administration.

BACKGROUND: FALLUJAH'S HEAVY HITTERS

¶13. (C): Sheikhs Hamid and Talib represent the two most significant tribes in the Fallujah area. Hamid is a senior sheikh of the local al-Alwanis, while Talib is the heir apparent of the more nationally-significant al-Issawi tribe, whose members include an Iraqi Vice President, a Deputy Prime Minister, and a prominent member of the Anbar Provincial Council. Sheikhs Hamid and Talib were fierce rivals before being brought together by Coalition Forces and the Sahwa movement into the fight against Al-Qaeda, and have since become close political partners and good friends. Their combined clout leaves them with a working dominance of the city (district) government.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: The council sheikhs have been staunch and effective U.S. partners since the Sahwa movement and "surge" strategy succeeding in wresting back control of Fallujah from AQI several years ago. They are savvy political operators. Their political futures (and perhaps physical safety) are now linked to the success of Coalition Forces-led efforts to create peace, stability, and prosperity in Anbar. There remain many unmet needs for advancing Fallujah's economic development, and it is doubtless true that the city government has few resources to apply to meet those needs. However, the sheikhs clearly have a strong political interest in bolstering their own position and they hope to obtain increased U.S. funding toward that end. The sheikhs offered no substantive evidence to corroborate their assertions about worsening security, and their warnings about a resurgent AQI may be exaggerated in their own self interest. Given the reduced levels of U.S. assistance, TL asked the sheikhs to help identify priorities for ePRT assistance from now until anticipated closure in summer 2010. END COMMENT.
HILL